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NANCY GAFFIELD

Springtime in the Rockies

Springtime in the Rockies is a 1937 film starring Gene Autry based on the country song of the same title. It is also the title of a sequence of poems by Brian Marley. Ed Dorn also wrote a poem with this title.

1/14

Climb down off the roof
my tongue. Happiness has to be
learned like long division.
The last supermoon dips
a toe in Brainerd Lake. Moose in slo-mo
racked & pinioned, rising out
of the willows. Pierce-arrow
screams from the trees. Sonofabitch.
Travelling through stretches of pine
forest fleshed out in undergrowth,
what the fire left behind
concertinaed charcoal husks.
Not so impressed with the trophy,
the dead glass eye, Eunice

2/14

goes instead to the drugstore
where Fritz fondles her between
the customers & closing time.
Give me that ole time religion.
Your sorrows pin you to
this place. You'll move to another city,
Eunice, but nothing is ever over.
One person's disaster is another's
Independence Day. It's hard to
anchor yourself when the water
keeps rising & re-drawing the borders.
The Poudre is a predicament
of uprooted limbs. This is not
the cool light of dawn but a shortcut

3/4

to hell on the I-25 bi-polar & fugue.
I wore my leather chaps on Coyote Ridge.
For fifteen years the sleeping
Indian spread out
before me. Look – I said – I want
to see the sea plaintively dragging
its skirt of plankton over the knees
of the world. Chinooks part
the canopy & I catch a glimpse
of a half-moon marooned & pining
in the assarts. I am reduced to a
grub but you claim I saved
your life though probably it was more
a matter of being in the wrong place

4/14

at the right time the killer
carried a crossbow & the bull
never stood a chance. Tame as a
sitting duck in a willow copse.
He was no huntsman, this was no quarry.
He shot the arrow, the animal fled
though not too far, not so far
as the forest. He died in open field.
In the Airstream Eunice watches
Walter & Jessie on Blu-ray.
Losers get flushed down
the can & what remains
of a man is a red stain
over & under

5/14

I stole the title from Brian Marley.
Today is the 50th anniversary of the Pop
Tart. You make me feel so young.
Eunice prefers the country
song – tractors, trucks, fishing, beer
& Jesus, go figure. She was a runner
born for leaving. On the way through
town she spies with her little eye
her father's mortuary has been turned
into offices. A psychoanalyst occupies the old
embalming room & across the street the Waterloo
Bar & Grill where the cinema used
to be. Can't get back. Can't
get back, the train's

6/14

refrain. The moment flickers.
Eunice measures out her life
in beer mats. Feeling kind
of restless. The old cowboy bar
upside the railroad track is closed.
The bullet holes in the bar
visible through the window.
The coal miner's shack she grew up in
sold for half a million. On Mockingbird
Hill words rush by with plenty of
espace between & around.
Hello Hollo. Your ghost wanders
round these parts with intent
Coo COO coo COO

7/14

Beware of parataxis. The New Poets
(British Branch) want nothing
to do with you. Don't worry about
the asshole in the corner who thanks you
for not using the mike. I wish
life was an opera I could live
in with my little sweetheart
of the mountains. Get back to that simpler
time when dogs smiled at me
from the porch. We find ourselves
in the Rockies far away on November 2,
1972. Boulder sees first measurable snowfall
of the season, but sunny skies set to return.
Another year or forty pass & we're still

8/14

here. In Rocky Park they shoot moose
don't they? Wolves howl at sundown.
Make it legal it's not fun
any more. I move smoothly through
quandariness. Continental Drift on the shelf
next to Hejinian, Hilson, Hollo & Howe.
'Sheets clapped at sky' & it's wonderful
weather for drying but no one hangs
their laundry out any more. Thinking
is writing. The page is paved with
good intentions never really knowing
why the wheelbarrow's full of flint.
The bough quakes in anticipation
of winter smeared on thick

9/14

reactive. I am in a nomad
situation of craggy peaks
Continental Divide spruce-fir
forest I-witnessing track &
call. This is crewel work.
Waadurrr cool & clear. Scissor-work.
Interaction with objects inside the event
horizon all paths lead to. He embroiders
the fir floor with garnets. White
mist low to the ground
I lay myself down
on the land. With the bones
of my ancestors. Different elements
are composed of air

10/14

thin like sentences on unbleached
muslin. Mother brought me up on
Spoon River. I could recite
Lucinda Matlock before I learned
my Catechism. Dear Ghost,
that was a simpler time before
my syntax went a-roaming.
Eunice can't remember the hand
that struck but the mark
is still there. Geography is a science
of trial & error but the Rockies
remain where they were planted
between us. Blue, brown & white
twitch & go

11/14

Grey geese fly overhead
in the letter V reversed. Swoosh
of wing beats
hush of home. Am pendulum
& composed of thirteen letters. The final
cluster is a clearing. An = one or none.
Across the sea I am not
one with my native land.
Am bivalent. Let's forget that
with a white sheet he tried
to erase me. With fire
he tried to deface me.
Put it to him later
He said 'can't remember'

12/14

the hot sun or the horizon
melting into liquid gold. Otherworld
flight of the black swift,
theorist of the wet cave she
compasses, spins, rolls &
banks. Pivot of quartzite walls
Uncompaghre waterfall.
'Go West young man
and grow up with the country.'
Meeker did & paved it
with his failures. They named
a town after him. Popular with hunters,
a favourite of prominent Americans,
a river runs through it

13/14

luminous certainty of the road
I sit on the shoulder. Double
Bind. Fearstorm & the sea
splintering. When Eunice was a child
she had a bear, named it Trauma.
In a green rectangular state
am suspended, am swinging
between selection & combination
or similarity & contiguity. Grammar
in locomotion, the whistle
of a freight train. Stepping
through the front door I
don't recognise anyone.
From now on life will unfold

14/14

in a topography of pain –
limestone, dolomite,
sandstone & shale. Laramide
Orogeny, thrust-faulting foothills
of rock under pressure. The continent
riding along on the wave
of convection, spreading across
the seafloor. On the corner of Walnut
& Main ‘I bear the traces
impressed upon me.’ Excessive light dispels
ghosts. Lived here once,
existing from the collar up,
the sleeves out. Poised between darkness
& face, a trick of light.

Notes

1/14

The Pierce arrow is also known as the NOR operator in logic, as introduced by Charles Sanders Pierce. The symbol is .

2/14

‘You’ll move to another city, Eunice, but nothing is ever over’ from the 2013 TV series *True Detective*.

3/14

People living along the Front Range urban corridor in Colorado call the higher back range mountains (Mount Meeker and Longs Peak) ‘The Sleeping Indian.’

In the Assarts is the title of Jeff Hilson’s

2010 collection of sonnets published by Veer. Hilson provides a definition of the word ‘assarts’ from the *OED* as ‘A piece of forest land converted into arable by grubbing up the trees and brushwood; a clearing in a forest.’ See also Hilson’s Introduction to *The Reality Street Book of Sonnets* (2008).

4/14

Walter and Jessie are characters in the 2013 American TV series *Breaking Bad*.

5/14

The title referred to is ‘Springtime in the Rockies’.

6/14

'Words rush by with plenty of espace between and around' is a borrowing from Anselm Hollo's poem 40 in *rue Wilson Monday*, La Almeda Press, 1988: 'how about just a few words / decoratively arranged on the page / with plenty of espace / between them around them . . .' Hollo taught at the Jack Kerouac School of Disembodied Poetics, Naropa University in Boulder. In 2001 poets and critics associated with SUNY Buffalo's Poetics Programme named Hollo 'anti-laureate' in protest against the appointment of Billy Collins as Poet Laureate Consultant in Poetry to the Library of Congress.

7/14

In Hollo's poem 15: 'give up your amper-sands & lowercase "I"s / they still won't like you / the bosses of official verse culture / (U.S. branch)' – *rue Wilson Monday*.

The concept of parataxis refers to what Ron Silliman calls 'the new sentence' which disrupts the syllogistic force of the sentence by interrupting the logical chains from which arguments and propositions flow.

The 'New Poets' relates to the 20 poets selected by the Poetry Book Society in 2014 to be 'Britain's Next Generation of Poets'.

'my little sweetheart of the mountains' is a quotation from Autry's song.

8/14

'Make it legal and it's not fun any more' may refer to Colorado's recent legalisation of the sale and use of marijuana for recreational purposes.

The word 'quandariness' appears in the Frank O'Hara poem 'The Day Lady Died'.

Lyn Hejinian writes in *My Life* (2008): 'My Lives on a shelf by Trotsky, George Sand.'

'Sheets clapped at sky' is from Susan Howe's 1980 poem 'The Liberties'.

9/14

The term 'event horizon' refers to the boundary marking limits of a black hole. In popular usage, it may mean the point of no return.

10/14

Spoon River is a tributary of the Illinois River in west central Illinois. The poem 'Lucinda Matlock' appears in *Spoon River Anthology* (1915).

11/14

Susan Howe's poem 'The Liberties' (Section III) contains the following word puzzle:

I am composed of nine letters.
1 is the subject of a proposition in logic.
2 is a female sheep, or tree.
3 is equal to one.
4 is a beginning
5 & 7 are nothing
6, 7 & 8 are a question, or salutation.
6, 7, 8 & 9 are deep, a depression.

12/14

'Uncompaghre' refers to the Ute tribe of southern Colorado. Chief Ouray (Arrow) became chief of the Ute people and tried to negotiate a treaty with the US Government to retain their land.

‘Go West young man and grow up with the country’ was a statement attributed to Horace Greeley, though the origin of the phrase is uncertain. It relates to America’s expansionist agenda popularised under the phrase ‘Manifest Destiny’.

Nathan Meeker was the founder of Greeley, Colorado, a town situated slightly north-east of the Front Range urban corridor. In 1878 he was appointed Indian Agent in charge of the Ute Reservation. He was an authoritarian figure who tried to impose his religious beliefs on the tribe, as well as modern methods of farming and cattle raising. The Utes refused to give up their way of life, and when Meeker located his headquarters on land sacred to the Utes, Meeker was killed along with eleven other men by

a small band of warriors. His wife and daughter were taken captive but later released. Theodore Roosevelt, amongst others, is known to have hunted for mountain lions in the area.

14/14

Laramide Orogeny is the term used to describe the formation of the Rocky Mountains.

‘I bear the traces impressed upon me’ is a quotation from Anselm Hollo’s poem 62 in *rue Wilson Monday*.

The idea that women live ‘from the collar up, the sleeves out’ comes from Junichiro Tanizaki’s book *In Praise of Shadows*. The phrase refers to the ‘erotic power’ of the Noh actor, whose face, neck and hands are the only flesh visible.

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